

Mount Vernon, Iowa

Population: 3,700

Type of Community: Suburban

Type of Program: Tags

Program Start Date: July 1991

Paying for one's waste has brought home to each of us a growing awareness of the full lifecycle costs of "throwing it out."

Getting Started: Why Pay-As-You-Throw?

Mount Vernon is a small, attractive college community in eastern Iowa, home to professional commuters as well as college staff. The city's income level ranks above average for the state. In July 1991, the city began to charge directly for the collection of residential trash, bulky items, grass clippings, and garden waste. At the same time, bins were distributed to begin curbside collection of materials for recycling. We expected these two steps to work together. Charging for each container of trash provided the financial incentive to move material from trash containers into recycling bins—the city would then contract to collect this recycling material free of direct charge.

pounds, and multiple tags for bulky items. Homeowners also receive a \$7 solid waste bill monthly. The city discounts the monthly fee for households defined as low income under the school lunch program.

While the revenue from tag sales roughly covers the cost of trash collection and landfill fees, the monthly billing finances the "free of charge" collection of recycling material, leaves, and brush. Residents say tags are a fair way to pay for trash disposal, and the combination of tags and monthly fees provides a steady revenue to the city.

Why Tags?

The city council appointed the Reduction and Recycling Committee to develop a solid

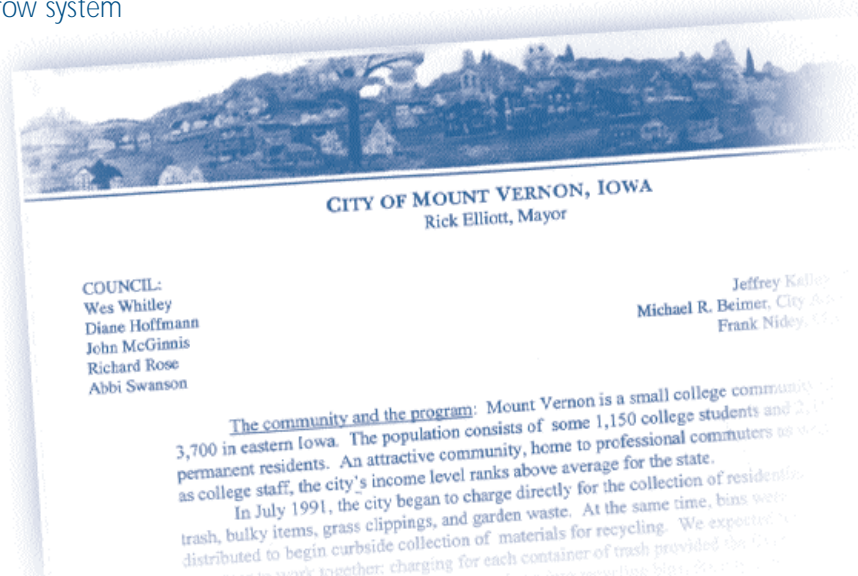
"We have not only reduced the amount of trash sent to the landfill, but also generated an enormous amount of civic pride in our efforts to do something positive for our community environment."

—Rick Elliot, Mayor

How Does It Work?

The city's pay-as-you-throw system works quite simply.

Households purchase \$1.75 tags at city hall or one of several stores. As a public service, stores sell the tags with no markup. The price for collection is one tag for each container, which must be no more than 30 gallons or 40





waste program. We spent over a year researching the experiences of other communities and consulting experts, and eventually recommended tags for waste collection to accompany curbside recycling. Tags cost little to print, permit residences to continue using their containers within the volume and weight limits, adhere securely at all temperatures, are convenient for participating merchants to handle, and can easily be removed when the trash is collected. Stealing of tags has not been a problem in this residential community.

Success: Increased Waste Reduction and Recycling

Pay-as-you-throw played a major role in motivating waste reduction and nearly doubling recycling. The city estimates that the trash the typical resident sent to the landfill decreased by nearly 40 percent, from 45 pounds per week in 1990 to 27 pounds in 1995. In addition, requiring a tag for each container of grass clippings and garden waste has nearly eliminated the collection of these materials. The total reduction of residential trash and all yard waste per household exceeds the goal of 50 percent waste reduction the state legislature has established for the year 2000. Dumping, subject to a \$1000 fine in Mount Vernon, has not been a problem.

Altogether, by recycling and reducing trash, and by leaving grass cuttings on the lawn or composting it, the average household saved \$47 last year in fewer tags purchased, a total saving of some \$46,000 for our 980 households. At 9 pounds per household per week, Mount Vernon leads all 17 cities in Linn County in recycling.

In addition to putting more into recycling bins, residents of Mount Vernon

have reduced waste in various ways: 1) recycling appliances; 2) recycling materials the city does not accept at drop-off facilities in Cedar Rapids and places of employment that recycle these items; 3) backyard composting of organic wastes; 4) purchase of reuseable rather than disposable materials; and 5) more yard sales. Much of this additional recycling and reduction is doubtless motivated by the tags that residents must purchase to send trash to the landfill. We believe that such incentives would also work with less expensive drop-off recycling programs in other cities.

As Mount Vernon's mayor, Rick Elliot, says: "Our program has been very successful due to the initial involvement of a large number of citizens, continued expansion of recycling opportunities, community education and ownership of the program, and a very civic-minded, cooperative recycling and refuse vendor. This program works and it works well."

How Mount Vernon's Program Could Be Even Better

The major challenge inherent in any reduction and recycling program is informing the public. The city needs to do better at keeping households current on changes in the recycling program. One successful example is an information packet prepared by the Recycling and Reduction Committee that explained to households how, with reasonably frequent mowing, grass cuttings left to decompose produce a healthier lawn. Informing households about alternative ways to deal with wastes goes hand in hand with pay-as-you-throw to maximize the effectiveness of the financial and environmental incentives.

Mount Vernon's success story was compiled by Don Cell, Chair of the Reduction and Recycling Committee. For more information on Mount Vernon's pay-as-you-throw program, call Bluestem Solid Waste Agency at (319) 398-1278.

PAY-AS-YOU-THROW SUCCESS STORIES

Falmouth, Maine

Population: 8,500

Type of Community: Suburban

Type of Program: Bags

Program Start Date: September 1992

By recycling and reducing waste, citizens not only save money, but also reduce costs for our community.

Getting Started: Why Pay-As-You-Throw?

In 1991, the Town Council directed the Falmouth Recycling Committee to explore options available for solid waste collection. After reviewing several systems, including traditional municipal collection, franchise contractor, and volume-based systems, the committee developed a report recommending a modified pay-per-bag system. In this system, the collection cost is paid through the tax system and the disposal cost is reflected in the cost of the special bag used in the town.

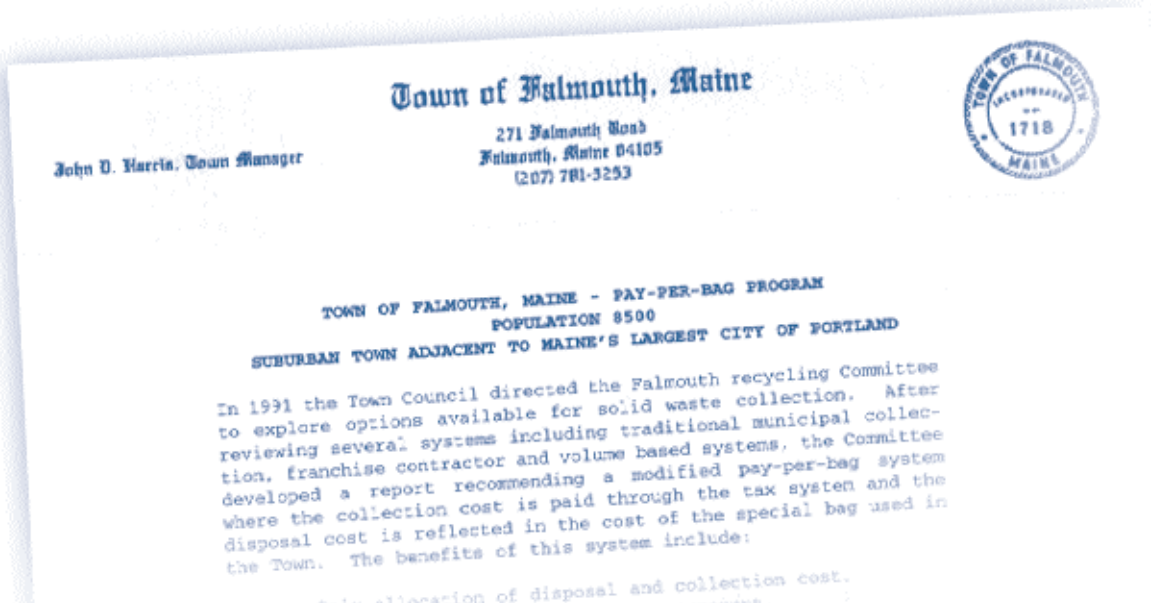
The benefits of this system include a fair allocation of disposal and collection costs, tax-deductible collection cost components, lower collection costs than a traditional non-fee system, incentives for recycling and waste

reduction, a favorable cash flow structure (bag revenues are received before disposal expense is incurred), and elimination of trash "mixing" by unscrupulous haulers. A unanimous vote of the council in the spring of 1992 directed the town to implement the program in September 1992.

How Does It Work?

The town buys about 175,000 large bags (33-gallon) and 75,000 small bags (20-gallon) each year. About a dozen local stores, including Shaw's Supermarkets, retail the bags. Bags cost the town 12 and 9 cents respectively and the store is allowed a

The success and acceptance of pay-as-you-throw in our community has been remarkable. Our recycling rate immediately jumped by more than 50 percent and trash disposal volumes decreased by about 35 percent.





2-cent per bag markup. The retail prices of the bags are 91 and 64 cents, respectively. In addition, a 91-cent sticker is available for bulky items under 35 pounds, and a \$4.80 tag is used for large items such as mattresses and sofas. Stores are invoiced for the bags at the time of delivery and have 30 days to pay. This system works well for the citizens, because they buy bags and simply use them the way they had before this program was implemented.

By recycling and reducing waste, citizens not only save money, but also reduce costs for our community. The burden on the town is minimal because its only responsibilities are bag delivery, billing, and recordkeeping. Also, cash flow is positive for the town because the bags are paid for before use. There is no concern with unpaid and uncollectible charges that can occur with post-use billing.

Success: Saving Money and Reducing Waste

The success and acceptance of the program in the community has been remarkable. Our recycling rate (always among the highest in the region) immediately jumped by more than 50 percent, and trash disposal volumes decreased by about 35 percent. Combined, these two statistics resulted in a jump of our recycling rates from 12 percent before the program to 21 percent currently. The average rate for local towns is 7 percent.

These statistics have meant a great deal to the economics of our waste program: The bid price for collection the first year was \$116,000, compared to a bid of \$146,000 for a traditional collection contract. Our current contract is for \$125,500 despite over 10 percent growth in the community. At \$55 per

ton, a reduction of 900 tons of waste disposal per year meant a savings of about \$50,000. The current \$98 per ton tip fee calculates to \$88,000 per year savings. In addition, during the old franchise system, residents paid the collection cost directly to the hauler. Now residents pay for collection through their taxes, bringing the community over \$30,000 per year.

Tips for Other Communities

Some towns have bought large quantities of bags and have been dissatisfied with size or quality. It may be prudent to buy a smaller quantity to start with so that changes can be made if desired. When you “force” citizens to buy your bag, it has to be of acceptable quality.

Educate prior to implementation! The town conducted a citizen survey, developed a brochure, published a newsletter, and passed out two free bags to each household prior to implementing the program. We also conducted a logo contest in the schools that generated a great deal of interest and media attention. The local Lions Club donated money for the prizes.

Contact other communities and learn! During our review, we read many articles published about other towns’ programs. This is useful, but following up with phone calls can be even more helpful. We got copies of several towns’ brochures that alerted us to some details that otherwise may have been overlooked.

Involve the collection team! The contractor or municipal crew can help or hurt the program, so they need to be on board. We developed a small tag for collection workers to leave at the curb if there was a reason to not pick up trash (i.e., not in proper bag or too heavy).

Falmouth's success story was compiled by Tony Hayes, (207) 781-3919.

Fort Collins, Colorado

Population: 100,000

Type of Community: Urban

Type of Program: Varies

Program Start Date: January 1996

Start planning for implementation at least six months in advance. This means both working with your private haulers and educating the public.

Getting Started: Why Pay-As-You-Throw?

Fort Collins is located on the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. Last year its population passed the 100,000 mark, but the community still takes pride in a small-town self-image, and residents are determined to manage growth well. The natural environment is highly valued, and solid waste reduction is a strong environmental program in Fort Collins.

The city conducted outreach and sponsored a recycling drop-off site for nearly 10 years, but without a municipal trash collection service, increased participation depended on haulers' efforts. A 1991 ordinance required haulers to provide curbside recycling, but because they included this service as an additional cost, most customers were unwilling to pay for the service. Construction of a county recycling center in 1992 also had little effect on residents' recycling levels.

The city council adopted goals in 1994 to reduce the total waste stream by 20 percent by the year 2000, despite the city's growth, and to reduce landfilled waste by 20 percent.

A specific target was set for increasing participation in curbside recycling by 80 to 90 percent. Reaching these goals has been challenging, because six private trash haulers work in Fort Collins, ranging from corporate players like BFI and Waste Management to locally run family operations that have been in business for 40 years.

Disappointed in a slow rate of progress for recycling, the city council adopted two ordinances in May 1995 that apply to single-family and duplex residences. The first ordinance called for haulers to "bundle" costs for recycling and provide curbside recycling to customers upon request at no extra charge. It became effective in October 1995. The second ordinance called for volume-based rates to be charged for solid waste starting in January 1996.

Pay-as-you-throw has helped us to reach our recycling goals—a real challenge, since there are six private trash haulers that work in Fort Collins.



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September 24, 1996

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Pay-As-You-Throw Rates Are Working in Fort Collins, Colorado

Background

Fort Collins is located on the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. Last year its population passed the 100,000 mark, but the community still takes pride in a small-town self-image, and residents are determined to manage growth well. The natural environment is highly valued, and solid waste reduction is a strong environmental program in Fort Collins. Since Fort Collins' weather, like Denver's (60°), is highly variable, the comprehensive plan is just being developed.



Lessons Learned

Start planning for implementation of the rate structure change at least six months in advance. We didn't start working with the haulers until September to implement the system in January. Then, after meeting together several times, the city agreed to amend the ordinance to respond to haulers' concerns about charging strictly by volume, but this process was time-consuming and difficult.

Make sure to publicize the changes to remind the public and their elected officials about what will occur in the next 2 to 3 months. Use news articles, advertisements, and haulers' billings.

Don't underestimate the difficulty people will have understanding how new trash collection rates work, and plan for the extra work it creates for staff. Be prepared for it to take 3, 6, or even 9 months for people to realize that they can save money by generating less trash with a PAYT system.

Expect private trash haulers to take the opportunity to increase collection rates at the same time the volume-based rates take effect. The public assumed the hike in collection rates was a result of the ordinance. Haulers helped spread the misunderstanding—it deflected criticism from them!

Make sure the transition between billing systems is smooth. Because we had some program overlap, both our haulers and the city staff got a new round of calls from angry, confused people who had received two different bills. However, the city has been adamant about reimbursing customers for cans/bags of trash that they didn't

generate—the most important feature of the system to reward people with cost savings.

Success: Increased Recycling Participation

As of July 1996, recycling has increased to 79 percent participation in single-family and duplex households, up from 53.5 percent the previous year. With only 6 months' worth of data to analyze trends, it is hard to specify what is happening with solid waste reduction goals, but we have clearly found a way to accomplish our goal for 80 to 90 percent participation in curbside recycling.

Now that the residents of Fort Collins are so much more conscious of reducing their waste stream, they have demanded opportunities to recycle new materials, including cardboard, office paper, and compostable items.

The bundling ordinance and PAYT system have significantly increased households' recycling efforts, so the experience, although sometimes difficult, was certainly worthwhile. Now that we're 6 months into the new system, the city council is already looking ahead to the feasibility of districting Fort Collins into trash collection zones!

We know that Fort Collins is not completely out of the woods yet. We are anticipating, for instance, that this fall's leaf-raking and bagging will add to peoples' trash bills—and that they are going to demand that the city do something about it. Still, we feel confident that Fort Collins made the right choice by adopting the pay-as-you-throw ordinance.

Fort Collins's success story was compiled by Susie Gordon, Environmental Planner, (970) 221-6265.